



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1301.0 - Year Book Australia, 1996

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 01/01/1996

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## A PROFILE OF AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

### 1994 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SURVEY

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended that a special national survey be conducted to provide information about a range of characteristics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The ABS commenced development of the national survey in early 1992, in consultation with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Over 15,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were interviewed for the survey in mid 1994. Most of the interviewers were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. The results were released in February 1995.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) results provide a wealth of information about health; family and culture; housing, education and training; employment and income; and law and justice. This article provides an overview of the information available from the NATSIS. Only a small selection of the total available information is included. Many of the statistics in this article come from the first major publication called Detailed Findings (4190.0) which is a national summary of results.

### The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population

The NATSIS interviewed a sample of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The ABS estimated that there were over 303,250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia at 30 June, 1994.

#### S1.1 ESTIMATED POPULATION, 30 JUNE 1994

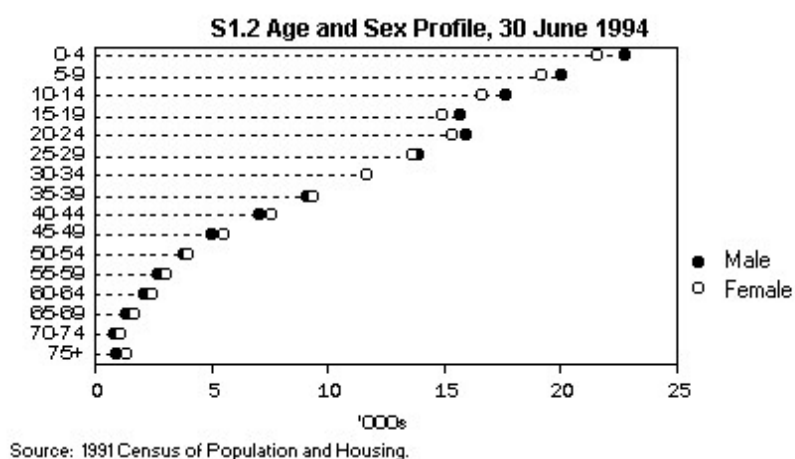
State	Males	Females	Persons	population
New South Wales(a)	40,460	39,970	80,430	1.3
Victoria	9,590	9,590	19,180	0.4

Queensland	40,080	39,760	79,840	2.6
South Australia	9,220	9,200	18,420	1.3
Western Australia	23,790	23,450	47,240	2.8
Tasmania	5,160	4,950	10,110	2.1
Northern Territory	23,100	22,950	46,050	27.4
<b>Australia (including ACT)</b>	<b>152,400</b>	<b>150,850</b>	<b>303,250</b>	<b>1.7</b>

(a) Information for the Australian Capital Territory is included in New South Wales.

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

Table S1.1 shows that New South Wales and Queensland had the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, while there were fewest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 27.4% of the total population in the Northern Territory, but less than 3% in all other States.



Graph S1.2 highlights the young age structure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. At the 1991 Census, almost 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were aged less than 15 years, compared with 22% for the non-indigenous population.

It was estimated that, in June 1994, 28% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in capital cities. The most centralised states were Victoria (48% in Melbourne) and South Australia (43% in Adelaide). The least centralised were Queensland (19% in Brisbane) and the Northern Territory (14% in Darwin).

## Health

The NATSIS asked questions about health status and health actions; attitudes to health; illness conditions; health risk factors; and access to health services. Overall, 88% of people considered themselves to be in good, very good, or excellent health. Despite this self reported health status, 44% of people took a health related action (which may have included admission to hospital, consulting a doctor, or using bush medicine) in the two weeks leading up to the survey and 41% reported a current health condition or illness.

Almost 35% of people had a health condition which they had experienced for six months or more (long term sufferers). Table S1.3 lists the major health conditions reported during the survey, and the percentage of males and females who experienced those conditions. Table S1.3 is concerned with all sufferers of current health conditions, not only those considered to be long term sufferers.

### **S1.3 TYPE OF CURRENT HEALTH CONDITIONS BY SEX, 1994 (%)**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Persons</b>
Asthma	13.8	16.8	15.3
Diabetes	11.7	10.2	10.9
Heart problems	7.2	8.5	7.8
Chest problems	6.6	8.9	7.7
Skin problems	6.8	6.5	6.6
High blood pressure	4.5	4.8	4.6
Ear or hearing problems	3.8	5.2	4.5
Eye problems(a)	3.1	4.4	3.6
Kidney problems	3.1	2.8	3.0

(a) Excludes eye problems which can be corrected by glasses.

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

The major reported current health conditions included asthma, which was a condition experienced by over 15% of people, diabetes, heart problems and chest problems. Diabetes was more common amongst males, while asthma, heart and chest problems were more common amongst females.

Alcohol was perceived by survey respondents as the major health problem in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as being the major substance use problem. Almost 60% of people aged 13 years and over stated that alcohol was one of the main health problems in their local area. Similarly, 76.2% of people aged 13 years and over also listed alcohol as a common social problem for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their area.

In the 1989-90 National Health Survey, 84% of people aged 18 years and over stated that they had consumed alcohol in the past year. The 1994 NATSIS found that 70% of Indigenous people aged 18 years or over had consumed alcohol in the past year.

The proportion of people who had consumed alcohol in the past year was higher in the south-eastern ATSIC Regions, and lower in the centre and north. The Hobart ATSIC Region (Tasmania) had the highest percentage (84%), while the Nhulunbuy Region (north-east Northern Territory) had the lowest percentage (34%). Seventy-nine per cent of adults said that they were happy with local health services, and 77% said there were no problems with local health services. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander involvement in health services was considered to be important by 78% of adults. Nearly 68% of people had access to Aboriginal health workers within 25 kilometres of where they lived.

## Family and culture

The NATSIS asked questions about family size and structure, separation from families, child care, cultural affiliation, and language. Of the 76,400 households containing families in June 1994, 7,100 (9.3%) contained more than one standard family unit. The ABS defines a family unit as a collection of related individuals residing together, where at least one of the individuals is aged 15 years or over. The survey found that over half (53%) of the families in which Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people lived consisted of couples with children, and less than one third (29%) were single parent families.

Over 10% of persons aged 25 years and over reported being taken away from their natural family. This compared to less than 2% for people aged 14 years or under.

### S1.4 PERSONS AGED 25 YEARS OR OVER - WHETHER TAKEN FROM NATURAL FAMILY AND WHO RAISED BY, 1994 (%)

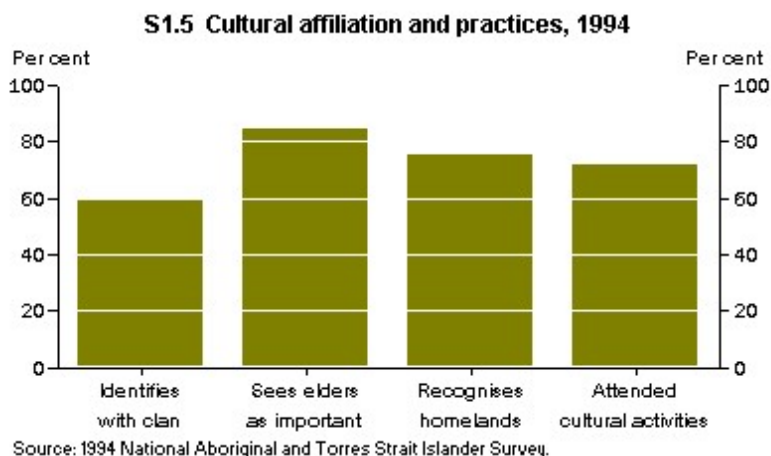
	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	Total
Taken away	8.6	12.0	10.6	10.8	10.3
<b>Raised by(a)</b>					
Unrelated Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander people	6.9	2.3	7.2	1.2	4.5
Non-Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander adoptive or foster parents	44.5	34.7	13.5	17.1	31.7

Orphanage/ children's home	24.7	40.3	23.8	14.4	27.9
Mission	9.0	28.3	42.5	68.4	30.7
Other people	13.8	8.5	19.2	1.6	10.8
Not stated	2.9	0.5	-	0.6	1.3
Not taken away	89.2	86.4	87.1	85.7	87.7
Did not answer	2.2	1.6	2.3	3.5	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) People could answer that they were bought up by more than one agent.

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey

Of the 12,500 people taken away from their natural families, 31.7% were raised by non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander adoptive or foster parents, 30.7% by missions, and 27.9% by orphanages or children's homes.



Graph S1.5 summarises some of the main findings of the survey in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural affiliation and practices. Over 84% of people aged 13 years and over saw elders as important, while slightly less than 60% identified with a clan, tribal or language group. Graph S1.5 also shows the percentage of people who recognised an area as their homelands (75%) and who had attended Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural activities in the past year (72%). The level of cultural affiliation is higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Twenty-one per cent of persons aged 5 years and over spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. For 14% of people aged 13 years and over, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait

Islander language was their main language.

## Housing

The NATSIS collected information about a range of housing issues including nature of occupancy, satisfaction with housing, and housing costs.

Ninety-eight per cent of households containing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person were living in private dwellings, and 2% in special dwellings such as hostels or boarding schools. Just under 2% of all private dwellings were improvised dwellings (that is, dwellings without permanent amenities). The mean household size, according to the survey, was 3.5 persons.

More than three quarters of households (77%) were living in dwellings which satisfied their housing needs. Over 21% of households were living in dwellings which did not satisfy their needs, usually because the dwelling needed repair or did not have enough bedrooms. A higher percentage of renters were dissatisfied with their housing (24%) than purchasers (9%) or owners (5%).

### **S1.6 HOUSEHOLDS IN PRIVATE DWELLINGS - NATURE OF OCCUPANCY AND TYPE OF LANDLORD, 1994 (%)**

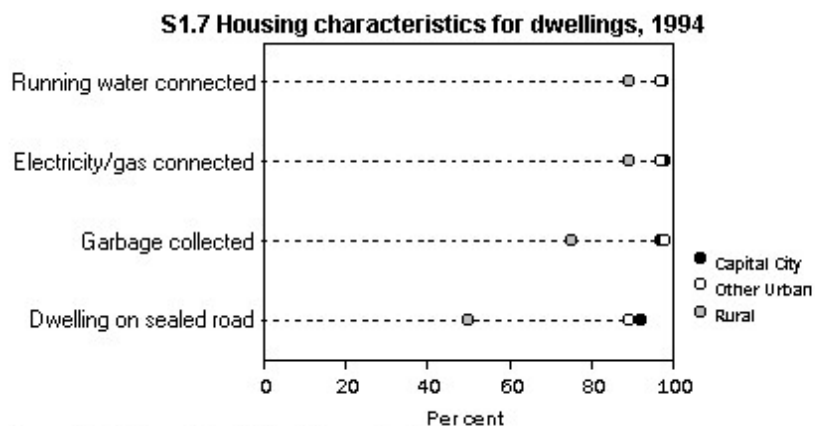
	Capital city	Other urban	Rural	Total
Renters	63.6	76.7	62.4	69.0
Purchasers	20.6	9.4	6.8	12.5
Owners	13.3	11.5	13.2	12.5
Other/not stated	2.4	2.7	17.1	6.0
<b>Type of landlord for rented dwellings</b>				
Private	42.3	21.3	14.1	26.2
Community	4.4	15.0	57.0	21.0
State housing	47.3	53.5	10.9	42.6
Other government	3.8	2.8	7.0	3.9
Other(a)	2.7	7.3	10.2	6.5

(a) Includes employer provided housing and not stated.

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

Over 42% of rented dwellings were rented from state housing authorities. There were more

privately rented dwellings in capital cities (42.3%) than in other urban areas (26.3%) or rural areas (14.1%). Community housing was a far more prevalent renting option in rural areas (57%) than in other urban areas (15%) or capital cities (4.4%).

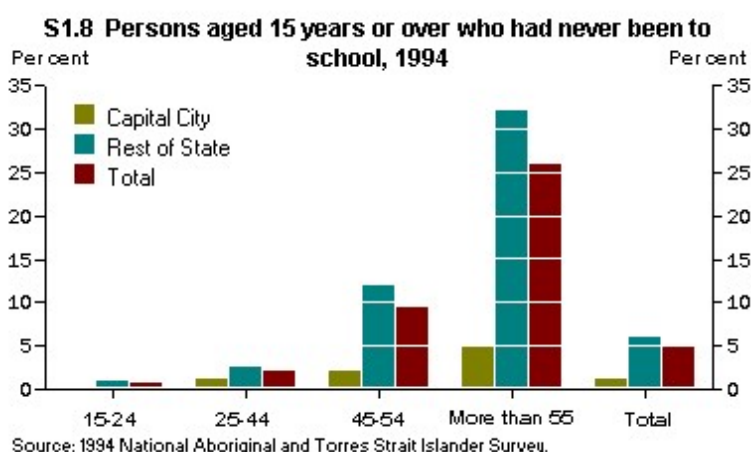


Graph S1.7 shows that capital cities and other urban areas had consistently higher rates of housing amenities and infrastructure, particularly sealed roads and garbage collection, than rural areas. The lower rates of housing amenities and infrastructure in rural areas was additionally important considering that there were more people, on average, in households in rural areas (4.9 persons per household) than urban areas (4.1) or capital cities (3.5).

## Education and training

The NATSIS collected information about types and levels of schooling, attitudes to schooling, and access to post-school education. Overall, 86% of parents stated that they were happy with their children's education, and 84% said that they were made to feel welcome at their children's school.

Five per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people aged 15 years and over had never been to school. The 1994 Survey of Education Attainment found that only 0.3% of the total population aged 15 years and over had never been to school.



Graph S1.8 shows a sharp decline in the percentage of people who had never been to school from a peak of over 26% for people aged 55 years and over, to less than 1% for people aged 15 to 24 years. Far fewer people living in capital cities than the rest of the State/Northern Territory had never been to school. This is particularly highlighted in the 55 years and over age group, where 5% of people in capital cities had never been to school, compared to 32% of those in the rest of the State.

Seventeen per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over had obtained a post-school qualification, and a further 7% had obtained the year twelve school certificate. Six per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over who had left school were studying for a qualification, mainly diplomas or bachelors degrees at universities or TAFE colleges.

Over half (52%) of the students were taught about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures at school. In addition, 18% were taught Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages. Over 8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attended Aboriginal Independent schools, while 87% went to government schools.

### **S1.9 SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLING BY TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED, 1994 (%)**

	<b>Government</b>	<b>Aboriginal Independent</b>	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Other non government</b>	<b>Don't know/ not stated</b>	<b>Total</b>
Taught about culture	51.1	88.5	55.6	33.7	51.9	52.2
Taught language	16.9	74.4	17.4	9.0	25.1	18.4
Taught by Indigenous teacher	12.7	45.4	15.5	4.5	19.0	13.7
Taught by Indigenous education worker	22.5	43.0	10.7	4.4	17.1	21.8
Taught by Indigenous community member	12.3	15.9	6.4	8.3	10.4	11.9

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey

Table S1.9 shows the percentage of students taught about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures and language, and whether they were taught by any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teacher, education worker, or community member. More students were taught about culture and language at Aboriginal Independent schools than other types of schools. Students at Catholic, Aboriginal Independent or government schools were more likely to be taught about culture and language, or by Indigenous staff, than students at non-government schools.

### **Employment and income**

The NATSIS collected information about labour force status, income, voluntary work, and difficulties in finding a job.



## S1.10 PERSONS AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER - LABOUR FORCE STATUS 1994 (%)

State/ Territory	Employed					Not in the labour force	Total	Partic- ipation rate
	Full- time	Part- time	Total employed	Un- employed	Total labour force			
New South Wales	21.8	10.6	32.4	27.1	59.5	40.5	100.0	59.5
Victoria	31.1	8.6	39.7	24.7	64.4	35.6	100.0	64.4
Queensland	22.8	16.7	39.5	19.4	58.9	41.1	100.0	58.9
South Australia	19.8	10.8	30.6	25.5	56.1	43.9	100.0	56.1
Western Australia	17.4	19.3	36.7	21.3	58.0	42.0	100.0	58.0
Tasmania	31.2	13.1	44.3	18.3	62.6	37.4	100.0	62.6
Northern Territory	15.3	16.1	31.4	18.3	49.7	50.3	100.0	49.7
Australia	21.4	14.4	35.8	22.2	58.0	42.0	100.0	58.0

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

The labour force participation rate is the total percentage of people aged 15 years or over who are in the labour force, either employed or unemployed. Victoria had the highest participation rate (63%), and the Northern Territory had the lowest (50%). In 1994 the participation for the total population was 63%.

Part-time employment was a major component of all employment in each State and the Northern Territory. There was a higher percentage of people employed part-time in Northern Territory, Western Australia, and Queensland, and a lower percentage in Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia.

Approximately one fifth of employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland (17.2%), Western Australia (20.7%) and Northern Territory (18.0%) were employed in Community Development Employment Project schemes.

Around 27% of persons aged 15 years and over engaged in voluntary work including: hunting, fishing, or gathering food; working for community or sporting organisations; working on committees and working at a school or with youth groups.

For unemployed people, the main difficulty in finding a job was that there were no jobs available in

the local area, or that people had insufficient education. Over 46% of employed people felt that their work allowed them to meet their cultural obligations.

The mean income for employed persons in Australia in June 1994 was \$27,100. The NATSIS showed a mean income for employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of \$21,300, although this figure changed to \$24,300 when people employed in Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) schemes were excluded.

#### **S1.11 EMPLOYED PERSONS - MEAN ANNUAL INCOME, 1994 (\$)**

	<b>Employed non-CDEP</b>	<b>Employed CDEP</b>	<b>Total employed</b>
<b>New South Wales</b>			
Males	27,000	13,500	24,800
Females	22,200	13,400	21,300
Total	25,100	13,500	23,500
<b>Victoria</b>			
Males	26,200	11,500	24,600
Females	19,300	22,100	19,400
Total	23,700	13,600	22,800
<b>Queensland</b>			
Males	25,800	13,300	21,500
Females	22,000	14,500	20,100
Total	24,300	13,700	21,000
<b>South Australia</b>			
Males	25,600	13,400	22,600
Females	21,800	15,500	20,300
Total	24,300	14,000	21,800
<b>Western Australia</b>			
Males	29,200	9,800	21,000
Females	20,200	11,900	17,300
Total	25,100	10,600	19,400
<b>Tasmania</b>			
Males	26,600	5,000	26,400

Females	16,900	*	16,900
Total	22,600	5,000	22,500
<b>Northern Territory</b>			
Males	22,200	11,800	17,000
Females	21,100	14,400	19,200
Total	21,600	12,600	17,900
<b>Australia (Including ACT)</b>			
Males	26,500	12,200	22,300
Females	21,200	13,800	19,600
Total	24,300	12,700	21,300

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Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey

Employed females consistently earned less than males except in the Northern Territory, where female incomes were higher than male incomes. Female incomes from CDEP were generally higher than male incomes. The Northern Territory had the lowest mean incomes, and New South Wales had the highest.

Government payments were the main source of income for 55% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over. The highest rate was 62% in South Australia, and the lowest rate was 48% in Tasmania.

## Law

The NATSIS collected information about the use of legal services, arrest rates, personal safety, and attitudes to police.

One fifth of people aged 13 years and over stated that they had been arrested at least once in the five years prior to the survey. A much greater proportion of males (32%) than females (9%) had been arrested. Approximately 25% of people aged between 15 and 44 years had been arrested in comparison to 8% of people aged 45 years and over. Fifty-seven per cent of those arrested reported having been arrested more than once.

### S1.12 PERSONS ARRESTED IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS - REASONS FOR MOST RECENT ARREST, 1994 (%)

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	Males	Females	Total
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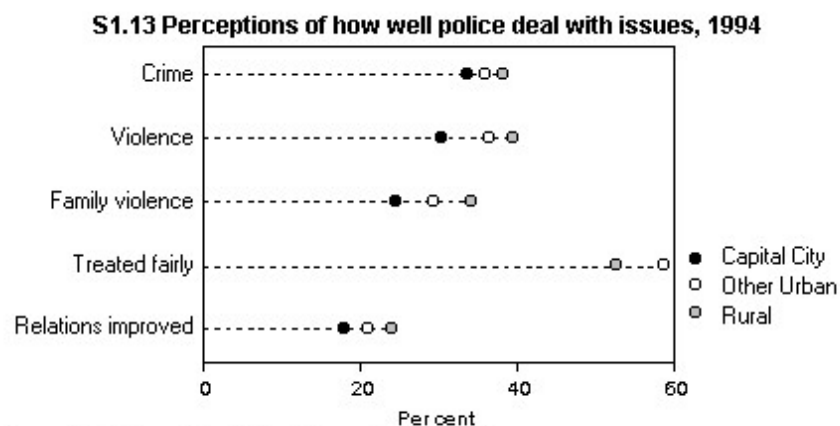
Arrested	31.5	9.2	20.4
Not arrested	68.4	90.6	79.6
<b>Reasons for most recent arrest(a)</b>			
Drink driving	26.1	13.8	23.5
Disorderly conduct/Drinking in public	30.6	37.2	32.2
Outstanding warrants/Breach of order	18.1	11.7	16.6
Assault	16.1	19.1	16.8
Theft/Burglary	15.8	12.8	15.1
Other reasons	18.7	18.1	18.3
No answer	4.8	6.4	5.7

(a) More than one reason for arrest could be given.

Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

The most common reasons for arrest were disorderly conduct/drinking in public, and drink driving. Females had a lower percentage of drink driving arrests than males, but a higher percentage of disorderly conduct/drinking in public and assault.

Approximately 13% of persons aged 13 years and over had been physically attacked or verbally threatened in the 12 months preceding the survey.



Source: 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey.

Graph S1.13 depicts how well people aged 13 years and over in capital cities, urban and rural areas thought that police performed their jobs. Graph S1.13 records whether people thought

police did a good job in dealing with crime, violence, and family violence, whether people felt they were treated fairly by police, and whether relations with police were better at the time of the survey than five years ago.

Generally, people in rural areas had more positive perceptions of police performance than people in urban areas or capital cities. Over half of those aged 13 years and over thought that they were treated fairly by police. Thirty per cent thought that police did a good job in dealing with family violence, and 37% felt that police did a good job in dealing with crime or violence. Around 20% felt that relations with police were better than five years ago, and a further 39% thought that relations were 'about the same'.

## **Conclusion**

This article has provided an overview of the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people based on the results of the 1994 NATSIS.

Only a small selection of the total information available from the survey has been included here. There are opportunities for in-depth analysis of a range of issues that are important for planning, community development, and equity and social justice issues.

The National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics within the ABS is planning a range of publications for release throughout 1995 and 1996 which will provide detailed information in each of the major topic areas examined in this article, and for each ATSI Region, State and the Northern Territory.

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Source: Year Book Australia, 1996 (ABS Catalogue No. 1301.0)

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